

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE	NO. 28-08
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TO: ALL STATE WORKFORCE LIAISONS
ALL STATE WORKFORCE AGENCIES

FROM: THOMAS M. DOWD 
Administrator
Office of Policy Development and Research

SUBJECT: Release and Availability of ETA Occasional Paper 2009-3: *Evaluation of the Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative, Final Report*

1. **Purpose.** To announce the release and availability of ETA Occasional Paper 2009-3: *Evaluation of the Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative, Final Report*
2. **Background.** In November 2005, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) awarded grants to 30 Faith-Based and Community Organizations (FBCOs) to implement a Prisoner Re-Entry Initiative (PRI). The initiative seeks to strengthen communities affected by large numbers of ex-offenders through employment-centered projects that incorporate education, job training, housing, mentoring, and other comprehensive services. The demonstration is based on the core premise that helping formerly-incarcerated individuals find and maintain stable and legal employment will reduce recidivism and increase public safety. Recognizing that FBCOs are well respected within their communities, have a history of providing social services to some of the hardest-to-serve populations, are able to tap into sizable networks of volunteers, and have the enthusiasm to support their undertakings, the initiative identified FBCOs as the entities to lead the local re-entry projects.

ETA contracted with an evaluation team from Coffey Consulting, LLC and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. to evaluate the 30 PRI demonstration sites during their first two years of development and operation, and to examine the implementation and early outputs of the PRI. In addition, the evaluation produced an analysis of grantee costs of providing services to the ex-offenders returning to their communities.

3. **Publication Description.** The report provides information on the experiences of PRI grantees as they implemented their programs and on participants' characteristics and outcomes as they worked to reintegrate into society. In addition, it includes key findings from analysis of the evaluation's qualitative and quantitative data. These findings include:

1. **Early recidivism rates across all grantees appear low.** Between 70 and 82 percent of participants were reported by grantees to have no involvement with the criminal justice system during the first year after release.
2. **Grantees made progress toward the goal of placing participants in employment, with two-thirds placed in unsubsidized employment and about half of these placed within three weeks of enrollment.** Tracking participants over time was difficult; nevertheless, MIS data showed that two-thirds of all participants were placed in unsubsidized employment as of May 2008, with average hourly wages at placement of \$9.29.
3. **Some participant characteristics are associated with better outcomes.** Women, older participants, white, Asian, American-Indian, Alaskan native, Hawaiian native, other Pacific Islander and multiracial participants, those with at least a high school diploma or GED at the time of their enrollment in PRI, those released from Federal institutions, and those who served longer terms in prison or jail had more success on a range of employment and recidivism outcomes.
4. **Nearly all participants received work readiness training, although receipt of occupational skill training was limited by participants' low educational levels, time constraints, need for immediate income, and community supervision employment requirements.** Workforce preparation activities, including career or life skills counseling and workforce readiness training, were the most widely used with over 90 percent of participants receiving at least one such service.
5. **Sites adjusted their mentoring programs in response to initial problems with format, content and participation.** Participation in mentoring activities increased over time, with just over 50 percent of participants attending at least one mentoring session by May 2008. Although establishing and maintaining participation was a common challenge, over half the sites also indicated that they had difficulty finding and/or retaining qualified mentors.
6. **Despite the wide range of service offerings, the length of participation in PRI was relatively short.** On average, participants spent 12 weeks in the program from enrollment to program exit, with half participating for eight or fewer weeks. Just over half of participants continued to receive at least some services after exit, with an average participation of 22 weeks from the date of enrollment to the date of last follow-up service.
7. **Sites confronted operational challenges related to participant tracking and retention in the program and after exit.** Retention efforts improved over time but many sites continued to experience difficulties tracking their participants. In particular, substance abusers, the homeless, and younger participants were more difficult to contact than other participants.
8. **Over time, projects increased their use of incentives for participants to attend certain activities or complete certain tasks or benchmarks.** To motivate participants to remain connected to their programs, to encourage participation in specific activities, and to reward participants for their achievements, grantees instituted various incentive programs over time.

9. ***Enrollment strategies increasingly focused on motivated or suitable candidates, with projects targeting ex-offenders who were likely to benefit from the services.*** Intake and assessment processes instituted or enhanced over time helped to identify suitable applicants and appropriate services.
 10. ***Substance abuse poses a major barrier throughout the re-entry process.*** Sixty-two percent of participants were released for drug crimes or driving while intoxicated before enrollment in PRI. Addressing this barrier proved difficult with many sites reporting that community resources were insufficient to handle the need for treatment.
 11. ***By providing project services through multiple partners and/or locations, grantees aimed to better meet participants' needs for assistance.*** Twenty grantees subcontracted out one or more services. In addition, over one-third of the projects offered case management, work readiness and related services at multiple locations, usually through subcontractors, to make it easier for participants to access services. Those grantees which out-stationed grantee staff at One-Stop Career Centers provided participants access to a wider range of work readiness services than they otherwise would have had.
 12. ***Sites concentrated on building partnerships with criminal justice agencies, and often relied on existing relationships with partners in other fields to assist PRI participants.*** Grantees successfully developed partnerships with key criminal justice entities needed to recruit project participants, and many PRI services were provided by external organizations through referral arrangements. However, grantees continued to face challenges identifying and accessing mental health and substance abuse services for participants.
 13. ***The PRI program cost less than expected per participant.*** For nine of the 30 FBCO grantees that were closely examined, the cost averaged \$2,495 per participant. When examining costs compared to outcomes, the PRI program costs \$3,786 per successful placement in unsubsidized employment. Among those with valid recidivism data, PRI services cost \$4,287 per participant who was placed in a job and remained free of crime for one year.
 14. ***Grantees garnered substantial donated, in-kind, and volunteer resources to supplement their grant funding.*** The same nine grantees that were closely examined garnered \$1.4 million in donated, volunteer, and in-kind resources from their communities. This amounted to 25 percent in additional funding beyond their PRI grants. Included in this is approximately 38,000 hours of time contributed by volunteers. In-kind resources helped support workforce preparation activities and additional supportive services.
5. **Inquiries.** To view an abstract of this publication as well as to download the full report as a PDF, visit the ETA Research Publication Database at: <http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/keyword.cfm>.